Unveiling the Impact of Toxic Masculinity in Select Works of Robert Cormier and F. Scott Fitzgerald

A

Synopsis

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Introduction

Masculinity is defined as a set of traits, behaviors, and social roles associated with men, such as being the bread earner of the family, suppression of emotion, or physical power. Masculine traits differ from place to place. It is socially constructed, but the biological role is a matter of debate among researchers. Anyone can inculcate these traits, whether be it male or female, as in western culture, “tomboy” and “butch” identities have been codified in recent decades among women.

The study of the history of masculinity began during 1980’s while researchers were disclosing the roles of females in society. Richard Eisler and J.R. Skidmore, in the article “Masculine Gender Role Stress: development and component factors in the appraisal of stressful situations” in 1987, discussed masculine stress. They presented forth, three elements of masculinity which causes emotional stress. First, being perceived as emotional, second, lack of physical fitness, and third financial or sexual inadequacy. These three elements add depth to toxic masculinity. Patriarchy is connected to masculinity, as it holds the power of men in society. It ensures that men lead the society perpetuating the stereotypical traits with it. Patriarchy adds more layers to toxic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity, having an origin of its own is primitive enough to have roots in our culture. In day to day lives, traits of masculinity is observed but its impact on people’s lives is less reflected upon. There has never been a time or age when masculinity is not talk about, be it in literature or in general. Masculinity has always been a topic of discussion, but keeping in mind that people have been evolving as human beings, more and more awareness is spreading.

Masculinity has never been a problem but its toxic traits are; aggression, violence, and hyper masculine behaviour, are some examples in general. Clashes between different genders is obvious but the root cause of the problem is always blurred from our sight. The blame game continues but sooner or later efforts to solve the problem is required. Toxic Masculinity as a concept is different from the common fights between genders. It also reveals the real root cause of inequality, which leads to terrible results. In order to understand it, a careful observation and analysis of its cause and effect is to be studied; how it impacts society and men in particular.

Through the study of the selected novels and various aspects of hyper masculinity, this research intends to highlight the complications and mental issues faced by every gender. It will focus on the effect and impact, these issues have on society. This research seeks to closely examine toxic masculinity through a close study of the primary, secondary and tertiary ones. Primary sources include Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974), *Heroes* (1998) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender Is the Night* (1934).

State of the Art

Selected works of Robert Cormier and F. Scott Fitzgerald deal with the themes of abuse, mental illness, violence, gaslighting and hyper masculinity which align with the relevant topic. It also intends to highlight the complications, mental issues that every gender faces and its effect and impact on the society.

Literature Review

Michael A. Messner, in his research paper "When bodies are weapons: masculinity and violence in sport" (2014), focuses on the violence associated with

sports. He talks about two levels of meaning in sports: first, the broad social-cultural, and ideological meaning of sports violence as mediated spectacle; second, the meaning that male athletes themselves construct. How men vary with their reasons to choose sports, such as, some men choose for the sake of society's approval of them to be a man. They try to fit into the mould to gain respect. It also discusses how the human body turns out to be a weapon that can cause serious pain, injury, and even death.

The impact of Toxic masculinity on men's mental health is discussed in Terry A. Kupers's article entitled "Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison" (2005). It shows how toxic masculinity becomes the blockage for men's mental health.

Hukum Thapa in her research paper, "Abjection of Body: Quest for Identity, Freedom and Maturity in Robert Cormier's The Chocolate war," discusses abjection. By abjection, Hukum means being cast out of the body. It discusses two categories of abjection given by Julia Kristeva and Karen Coats; social and psychological. Psychological abjection refers to an individual's own abjection towards one self. On the other hand, social abjection depends on society. It discusses different characters of the novel; Jerry Renault, Archie Costello, Brother Leon, Emile Janza and others. Jerry as a young adult faces several instances of abjection in Trinity School, whether on the football ground, in the classroom or in the boxing room. It presents the positive side of abjection, as Jerry always tries to escape it.

In the text *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities (2004)* by Michael S. Kimmel, specifically the thirteenth chapter, "Masculinities in Education'', presents

schools as the building blocks of the toxic traits in men. Schools are a place of safety for students, but the writer wants to show how they can be sites of sexual harassment, abuse, and homophobia, as well as sources of other sanctioned violence.

Tender Is the Night is examined from a different perspective in Alyssa Q. Johnson's article, "Decorating the Performative Body in Tender Is the Night". This article is based on clothing and its demonstration of class, and the treatment of gender and how it changes accordingly. The French Riviera has been portrayed as a glamorous girl getting all the attention and status. The historical background of the time of *Tender Is the Night* depicts a changing display of clothing to rise above their previous social status.

Research Gap

The topic endeavors to explore a significant gap in understanding how toxic masculinity is not limited to a particular gender. Its traits are socially constructed and can be acquired by any gender. In addition, it also aims to explore, how women too, participate in glorifying these traits by acquiring them. It aims to understand the problems of men that have skyrocketed because of the justification of these traits, which set a hyper-masculine model for men to follow.

Problems to be investigated

1. Several psychological problems that men face after confronting their toxic traits of masculinity.
2. The novels do psychologically change the established model for men to follow.
3. The selected narratives do help to understand the hyper sexualize behavior of their male characters.

4. Women do safeguard and adopt these traits to gain power in society.
5. The novels do identify, highlight and relate the toxic traits of masculinity that people today are unaware of.

Objectives of the Research

1. The main objective is to identify and gain a better understanding of the novels from the point of view of toxic masculinity and how it affects the lives of many, whether be it psychological, physical, mental, social, or emotional.
2. It also aims to study the role of men and women towards toxic masculinity, their relationship with other genders and how the affected behaviour directly or indirectly impacts lives. It explores to study its other dynamics, to gain better understanding of the problem and to find solutions at its pace.

Hypothesis

The study seeks to explore the nature of existence of both men and women under the impact of toxic masculinity. How it affects people's lives in general, taking into account the physical, mental, social, and psychological aspects. The four novels intend to explore it in detail. Through the study of the characters in the select novels the research attempts to present how men suffer, inculcating these traits. It also reveals the pressure and burden on men which affects their personal, social and psychological development and relationships. Due to their inability to overcome it, they still, wear these badges as an honour on their chests. The proposed hypothesis intends to study the predicament of men, mental habits, the complex structures of society, the stereotypes of toxic masculinity.

Methodology to be Used

The method that will be used to analyze the research is the library research method or descriptive research method. The selected novels will serve as the primary source while the other novels, texts, articles and other studies related to the research as secondary resource.

- The first step is close reading.
- The second step is collecting the data or information about the topic that is analyzed by the writer. The data can be collected from many sources, such as books and internet sources.
- The third step is analyzing the elements from the novels mentioned above.
- The fourth step is examining the elements from the novels through the toxic masculinity approach.
- The final step is drawing critical conclusions from the whole analysis.

Tools to be Used:

The proposed study is qualitative in nature. Hence the tools and resources to be used are library resources as books, academic journals, dissertations, articles and, online resources-online resources such as articles, books, databases, websites. It will provide access to the content associated with the concerned topic. Questionnaires are to be prepared to gather qualitative and quantitative data. It will help to collect first-hand information about the concerned topic.

Plan of the Work

The proposed thesis is to be divided into following chapters:

Chapter 1 : Introduction

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

Chapter 3 : Hegemonic Masculinity in *The Chocolate War*

Chapter 4 : The War Tradition in *Heroes*

Chapter 5 : Hyper-Masculinity in *The Great Gatsby*

Chapter 6 : Sexism in *Tender Is the Night*

Chapter 7 : Women as the Safeguard of Toxic Masculinity

Chapter 8 : Conclusion

Bibliography

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the 1990s, the term "toxic masculinity" was developed by sociologists and psychologists exploring the Men's Movement of the 1980s-1990s. Masculinity in its traditional form has several stereotypes of men as dominant, misogynist, and homophobic, which encompass a negative attitude towards homosexuals or towards those who have been perceived as unfit for predefined model of being a man and this attitude has been normalized by society which needs to be unveiled. In recent decades, people consider it seriously. The study of gender has expanded across different fields of study such as the humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, and other fields. If we take a problem-solving approach, then it simply emphasizes that every gender needs to be together or help each other to uproot this problem. This research aims to focus on the toxic traits of masculinity that hamper men's lives and how the glorification of these traits hinders people's lives in varied ways. An Australian archaeologist Peter McAllister came with a theory of masculinity in his book entitled, *Manthropology: The Science of Why the Modern Male Is Not the Man He Used to Be* and said, "I have a strong feeling that masculinity is in crisis. Men are really searching for a role in modern society; the things we need to do aren't in much demand anymore." And this stress to fit in the world which enforce different toxic traits of masculinity which are unhealthy for society and men themselves.

The chapter aims to explore and present forth a detailed understanding of toxic masculinity, its origin, impacts and effects. The primary texts include *Heroes* and *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier, *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Heroes was written in 1998 by Robert Cormier, an American writer and journalist. The novel deals with the themes of abuse, glorification of war, mental illness, violence. The protagonist, Francis Cassavant a false hero, a disfigured man discloses harsh reality of war. The study of the central character presents forth the traits of toxic masculinity.

The second novel for study, *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier was published in 1974.This particular novel emphasizes the culture of bullying, revenge, betrayal, conspiracy, physical abuse in school setting. The protagonist of this novel, Jerry is himself a victim. Throughout the novel, several incidences, scenes, dialogues and even plot is aligned with the concerned topic.

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, an American novelist, essayist, and short story writer. *The Great Gatsby,* a 1925 novel set in the Jazz Age on Long Island, near New York City. The central character Jay Gatsby chases Daisy Buchanan a woman whom he lost once. In the pursuit, the traits of hyper masculinity are observed. In both the major and minor characters, different evidences of hyper masculinity are observed. It at the same times also presents the materialistic outlook of the characters in the novel.

The second novel of F. Scott Fitzgerald for study, "*Tender Is the Night*" is set during the twilight of the Jazz Age. It was published in 1934 and focuses on a couple's rise and fall; Dick Diver, a young psychiatrist, and his wife, Nicole. In this particular work, the focus is on mental illness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter focuses to explore the existing knowledge and resources available. The relationship between masculinity and patriarchy has been studied extensively in recent decades. However, the available literature reveals the complications, differences and approaches that lead to different conclusions. Masculinity is primarily discussed with father-son relationship, bullying culture in school, mental health condition of men from different perspective. In the article "Decorating the Performative Body in Tender Is the Night" Johnson discusses the treatment of women based on clothing among people of different classes. He gives the example of Riviera who has been portrayed as a fashionable and glamorous girl. Further, Masculine hierarchy is highlighted. It also discusses how men fight among themselves to achieve status and hierarchy.

Chapter 3: Hegemonic Masculinity in *The Chocolate War*

The Chocolate War revolves around the central character Jerry Renault, and how he faces bullies at Trinity High School, among other problems. At first, Jerry, the protagonist faces physical abuse by his coach at the playground. Initially, it seemed as if the coach was trying to teach him the sportsmanship but gradually the build-up of the whole scene reveals the actual toxicity. The coach while abusing him physically makes harsh statement, that he could not play football, saying "You don't have enough flesh in your body. What kind of boy are you?".

His father's extreme work load also creates a gap between him and his son. Observing his father working day in and day out with minimum rest or sleep makes the protagonist develop similar traits and understanding of masculinity. Jerry's personal and

school life experiences leads him to develop hyper masculinity.

In *The Chocolate War*, the existing school culture is studied. Jerry being bullied by his fellow students and seniors, highlights the superiority complex in the text. It highlights the toxicity in school culture similar to Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days (1847)*. Tom Brown, the protagonist at Rugby School faces several challenges that disclose school and sports culture respectively. The bullying culture at Rugby school troubles Tom significantly, specifically Flashman's character, which helps to illustrate the prevailing mind-set, "boys will be boys". Other aspects as hierarchy, sexism, patriarchy and even racism in the text enables to understand the existence of toxic traits of masculinity in literature.

Chapter 4: The War Tradition in *Heroes*

The chapter intends to explore the impact and glorification of war through *Heroes* (1998) by Robert Edmund Cormier. His novels deal with the themes of abuse, mental illness, violence, revenge, betrayal, and conspiracy. He wrote several works, including *I Am the Cheese*, *After the First Death*, *We All Fall Down*, and *The Chocolate War*. The study of the protagonist, Francis Cassavant, exposes the toxic impact of war on people. It focuses on negligence and glorification of war. Through the analysis of the impact of war, it examines hyper masculinity as the trait of toxic masculinity. It also studies the reason behind men inculcating hyper-masculine behavior in their lives. The war tradition and its violence wrapped in glorification is focused upon. It counters the belief that war is desired that leads to gain honour. Francis's detailed portrayal of his face after the war shows the destruction that leads to identity crisis, lack of motivation, suppressed emotion, no life after war, secluded life.

Chapter 5: Hyper masculinity in *The Great Gatsby*

In this particular chapter through the central character Jay Gatsby hyper-masculinity is studied. Hyper masculinity is defined as an exaggerated form of masculinity associated with traditional masculinity which promotes violence, aggression, extreme physical prowess and male stereotypes. The chapter will focus to have a better understanding of the set model of masculinity that impacted the characters of the novel. The study of the characters as Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan and George Wilson are crucial.

Tom's character seems more like a stereotypical manly character who never misses a chance to show physical strength as he violently confronts Myrtle Wilson and later attacks Gatsby. His affair with Myrtle and his dominant behavior towards her shows his superiority complex that is aligned with hyper masculinity. The way he reveals his views about racial matters and his behavior towards others shows his feeling of entitlement. Like the other hyper masculine traits, suppression of emotion is also evident in Tom. This trait is also found in Jay Gatsby's personality.

Jay Gatsby is more of a materialistic person. He was in love with Daisy and by getting rejected by her, he pursued an idealized version of success and masculinity which lead him to his last breath. His life was based on an ideology that many men follow. They are becoming more and more career oriented to earn as much as money possible to feel good about themselves, so that they can feel powerful and attract women. And this false ideology shows the impact of hyper masculinity in Great Gatsby's life. Daisy had already married Tom, but still Gatsby being in denial, never

accepted the reality, suppresses his emotions and never found happiness in his entire life. Gatsby's character is a good example of a man who pursues the American dream and get nothing out of it. The American dream is another way to entice people to follow these traits of hyper masculinity.

Chapter 6: Sexism in *Tender Is the Night*

The text studies the aspect of sexism both in the male and female characters. Dick Diver, the central character shows his dominant nature towards his wife Nicole Diver, who was once his patient. Nicole was dependent on him financially, which reflects the societal tendency to undervalue women's rights and by undervaluing women's rights, society tend to foster a feeling of entitlement in men to take care of everything. As it happened to Dick Diver, he found nothing wrong in treating his wife as he treated her. Dick, is a character who seems intellectual at first but nevertheless proves his feeling of superiority by marrying his own patient. Several scenes depict the power of Dick over his wife. The text also presents Nicole's father who raped her. All her life she struggles with her mental issues whereas the father never felt any sense of guilt. All the same; him blaming her and admitting her in a mental hospital for treatment.

Nicole Diver's character represents the impact of toxic masculinity in her life's choices. Nicole's mental state discloses her family's background and lack of love throughout her life. As a result, she chooses to marry her doctor due to the care and love she received from Dick Diver.

Chapter 7: Women as the Safeguard of Toxic Masculinity

In each women character in the selected novels, women are safeguarding the traits by justifying their toxicity, accepting these traits, and influencing their children in the same way. Daisy's character in *The Great Gatsby* justifies the materialistic behavior of men. When she chooses to marry Tom, a rich man that motivated the main character to follow an overly materialistic and false dichotomy. On the other hand, through Nicole's character in *Tender Is the Night*, the pre-defined notion of patriarchy accepted by women is presented. It leads them somewhere they even didn't want to go. For instance, Nicole marries to Dick Diver, her doctor.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The chapter aims to present the final statement and findings of the research as a whole. It studies the traits associated with the characters and how it hampers their lives. These four selected novels will explore the social, political and personal implications of toxic masculinity in the characters lives. It will shed light on the implications for future research and key findings. It will also give a summary of the entire findings for future endeavors.

Significance of the Study:

Discussions on gender politics, patriarchy, and misogyny continues till present date. But it is always from the point of view of the victims where the real cause is yet to be highlighted. In order to figure out the root cause certain questions are to be employed as, what pushed them to become the culprits? Do they enjoy it? How much can a wrong thing benefit an individual or community? Why are people not focusing on the culprits?

According to the general statistics, more than half of the population is of men. People are very much aware of the fact that they are in every part of the world. The predefined notion of society has made their lives suffocating and difficult to live. The importance of this study is to find the toxic traits of masculinity so that people can appreciate men with healthy masculinity. It aims to help men have a better understanding of their own masculinity. Additionally, women also play significant roles in perpetuating these traits, which needs to be examined. Women significantly play roles in preserving these traits that need to be unveiled. This study will foster a better understanding of society in relation to men.

Relevance to the Present-Day Problem

Humans are irreplaceable. In order to have a healthy society, humanism should align with the actions of the doers. The study aims to foster an equitable society by pointing out the real problems prevalent among different genders. It will help society become more aware of gender-based problems that are directly associated with traits of toxic masculinity.

The study aims to address the problem of gender by advocating for its root cause. It will help to foster a compassionate and equitable society by addressing the impacts of toxic masculinity on society. It can also refine existing research and its discoveries.

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